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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the intrinsic motives that account for teachers leaving their profession. Former teachers in the Haifa area of Israel participated in interviews, giving reasons for leaving teaching that correlated with those found in a study of the literature. The most frequently mentioned reasons for leaving teaching were: (1) burnout and the need for renewal; (2) lack of encouragement for initiative; (3) low professional status of teachers; (4) lack of autonomy; and (5) lack of promotional opportunity and few challenges. Other sources of dissatisfaction included a sense of the gap between what is expected of teachers and what the teacher is able to achieve and lack of appreciation by parents and pupils. The results of a questionnaire administered to 190 elementary and secondary school teachers showed that their readiness for leaving their jobs depended on background variables and such factors as professional identity, work satisfaction, and autonomy. It is suggested that teacher turnover might be lessened if administrators are sensitive to teachers' desires for more personal autonomy, their need for greater satisfaction in their work, and a higher professional identity. (JD)

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Teachers' Professional Identity and Job-Leaving Inclination

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Los Angeles, CA, April, 1981).

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ABSTRACT

The spreading phenomenon of teacher turnover was the drive for the present investigation.

The aim was to identify factors that account for teachers' inclination to leave their profession. Factor analysis procedure on items derived from discussions with teachers and from relevant research literature yielded the following factors: readiness for job-leaving; professional identity; work satisfaction and autonomy.

A flow model and path coefficients indicate that job-leaving inclination is predicted from professional identity, work satisfaction and autonomy.

Interpretations and implications for educational administrators and policy-makers are suggested.

Teachers' Professional Identity and Job-Leaving Inclination

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Teacher turnover has become a spreading phenomenon and a cause of concern to administrators and educational policy makers. This concern is understandable in view of the considerable resources, manpower and planning invested in teacher pre-and in-service training. These resources are perforce wasted on those job-leavers who were supposed to benefit by them. Teachers who are merely thinking about leaving the field are no less of a concern than those who actually carry out their intention, because the presence of disgruntled elements in a school system may well infect others and start a chain reaction. The effects may range all the way from lack of teacher motivation to a decline in pupil achievement.

It is our intention in the present paper to identify variables which will account for the inclination to leave the teaching profession. Since economic reasons for job-leaving have been treated in the past they will not be included here instead, this study will focus on intrinsic motives and attempt to discover the extent to which they play a part in the rising drop-out rate. Hopefully, findings will both illumine the theoretical issue of factors in intrinsic motivation to leave teaching and the practical question of how to increase stability in the profession. A first step towards coping with the problem is to isolate its main dimensions other than the economic ones.

Hypotheses likely to account for inclination to leave teaching were derived from two sources: (a) Discussions with teachers; (b) The relevant literature. Both will be reviewed briefly:

(a) Discussions with teachers. In a meeting with former teachers who declared their willingness to devote several evenings to discuss their reasons for leaving the teaching profession the question was posed: "What are in your opinion the reasons for which teachers leave their jobs?" Five main topics surfaced during the discussions in addition to economic reasons that were frequently mentioned, but will not, as previously mentioned, be dealt with here:

1. Burn-out and a need for renewal: "I am worn out by the demands of a rigid school system, the need to deal with administrative matters of lateness, absences, and proper attire." "Small matters such as these left me no time for trying new things in class and learning new things myself." "My job as a home room teacher turned into one of mediating complaints such as about the shortcomings of specialist teachers. This led to a deterioration of relations with pupils." "During my first year as a teacher I loved to teach. It was the thing that epitimized me. Then I felt a prolonged exhaustion, and now I am no longer willing to make the effort." "The need to go over the same material year after year is tiring and boring."

2. Lack of encouragement. "On the one hand you are supposed to introduce youthfulness and renewal, but on the other hand, when you try to do it, you open yourself to criticism." "If you act within the accepted framework you are permitted to make mistakes, but when you try anything new and fail, it is held against you." "I discovered that initiative arouse anxiety both among colleagues and principals."

3. Status of teacher. A teacher who became the principal of a well-known school and is now head of a public corporation, had this to say: "People were always puzzled at my being a teacher and used to say to me: "A person with your initiative, energy, and ability is wasted on teaching" or : 'What is a man like you doing in teaching? One only works with women, my

ego was hurt; "I did not feel appreciated. As a principal I was bothered each morning by phone calls from teachers who announced that they could not come in to work." Another male teacher co-ordinator expressed what appeared to be the consensus: "I was expected to take upon myself the 'sins' of others, act like a sergeant major even among teachers. Work morale was low."

4. Teaching as a profession. "I had neither the freedom nor the authority to act in my own fashion: I was constantly under scrutiny and at the same time felt alone." "Instead of getting administrative support and help, it was up to me to succeed by the mere strength of my personality. In matters of discipline that is not always enough." "I felt no need to learn or read, was able to do my work without renewing myself, and did not have the time for it anyway. Nowadays, when I come home from work I have some leisure, read much more than before I left my teaching job, and feel that I am growing more."

5. Promotion. "The only avenue to promotion is into administrative positions. I was never interested in that, although I was offered the position of principal several times." "If positions in school were rotated I might have found my place in the system."

The same topics kept coming up in further conversations with teachers: Low status, wear-and-tear, lack of recognition, not enough challenges.

(b) The relevant literature. A search of the literature turned up lines of thought similar to those voiced by teachers. Among the more prominent ones were Teacher status. Perception of teaching as a profession (professionalism), and Work satisfaction:

1. Teacher status. The concept of status grew from studies of social stratification and serves as a means by which individuals are differentiated within a social hierarchy by some criterion of relative standing. Efforts to determine the status of teachers began in the late 20's when samples

from different populations were asked to rank the teacher from among a list of professions (Counts, 1925; Wilkinson, 1929). With the advent of mass education and occupational diversification, teachers, who had once been among the educated few, lost status. This happened in Israel, too. The revival of the Hebrew language had propelled teachers into positions of intellectual leadership despite the hard working conditions. Ben David (1957) maintains that after the War of Liberation in 1948/9 the status of teachers dropped partly as the result of feminization, but mainly because of the gap between the ideology that teachers are supposed to represent and the reality that actually developed.

Studies since the sixties indicate that teacher status hovers around the middle of the hierarchy (Etzioni, 1969). Israeli teachers claim that the public tends to deprecate their occupation and that parental participation in policy-making demeans it even further (Adar, 1957).

It may be assumed that a prestigeful occupation will draw more candidates than one less prestigeful. Individuals who work in high-status professions like the law or medicine do not generally seek admission to other professions out of their own free will. This however is a common occurrence in lower-status professions. The inclination to leave the teaching profession maybe, in part, a function of perceiving it as a low-prestige occupation.

2. Perception of teaching as a profession (Professionalism). The inclusion of professionalism among the research variables goes back to the concept itself: In the Dictionary of Education, Good (1945) suggests two main characteristics that mark a profession: Specialized and prolonged training acquired as part of a higher education and a code of ethics. Other characteristics have been added over the years, such as systematic knowledge, a community orientation, and self restraint. There is also an

ideological component that includes personal involvement, collective identity, research-and-theory based performance, autonomy in the decision making process, and staying power (Horton, 1944; Lieberman, 1956; Greenwood, 1964; Millerson, 1964; Jackson, 1970). The literature spans a wide array of views on professionalism (Etzioni, 1969; Weil & Weil, 1971). It is reasonable to suppose that an individual who qualifies on the above counts will not be inclined to leave the profession. He or she will become involved in the profession and identified with both the reference group and its work ideology.

3. Work satisfaction. Work satisfaction is defined as the readiness to stay at a job as opposed to the desire to leave it (Simon & Marsh, 1958), satisfaction generates involvement and constitutes an important factor in the desire to invest time and effort in the job (Vroom, 1962). The following are some of the reasons for dissatisfaction with teaching have been studied: The gap between what is expected of the teacher and what the teacher is able to achieve (Retting & Passamanick, 1959); Lack of appreciation by parents and pupils (Bream, 1956; Sergiovanni, 1967); Pupil motivation (Lortie, 1975); Self-realization (Gurin, Veroff, & Feld, 960); Status (Jacobson, 1978). A second hypothesis then considers the extent to which dissatisfaction contributes to teacher turn-over.

The three variables surveyed, i.e. status, professionalism, and work satisfaction are probably interrelated: The characterstics of a profession lend status and prestige to those who are associated with it (Lieberman, 1956; Jackson, 1970). Work satisfaction is associated with the status of the job, the autonomy it provides, and the sense of belonging to a prestigious reference group. Also, a person who has chosen a profession, perceiving it to have high status, and is satisfied with it, will surely persist in it.

The study hypothesises a relationship between each of the variables derived from the discussions with teachers and from the analysis of relevant literature and the inclination for job-leaving.

METHOD

The questionnaire

The study was carried out by the aid of a Likert-type a questionnaire. The items were based on the topics raised by the interviewed teachers and the search of the literature. Also included were items expressing the inclination to leave the profession. In its first version the questionnaire contained 70 items. These were culled down to 23 by factor analysis. The method used was that of principal axes with varimax rotation of the four factors that had eigen-values above 1.0. The 23 items retained were mainly those that had factor loadings of .35 and above. Table 1 presents the item composition of the final questionnaire, item means, standard deviations, and alpha-type coefficients of internal consistency for each of the subscales. It will be noted that the coefficients range from a low of .640 to a high of .802, all moderate values.

Insert Table 1 about here

Following item content analysis, the four factors were named Readiness for Job Leaving, Professional Identity, Work Satisfaction, and Autonomy. Two of these factors Readiness for Job Leaving and Work Satisfaction were proposed a-priori on the basis of the rationale but two others that had also been planned, to wit Status and Perception of Teaching as a Profession (Professionalism), failed to emerge from the factor analysis. Instead, the two remaining factors were named, as seemed appropriate to their content, Professional Identity and Autonomy.

Of all the items that had been classified under Status, the one that remained among the 23, "I am satisfied with the status of teachers as perceived by the public", fell in with the Work Satisfaction factor, possibly because of the first three words. The items that were intended to make up Professionalism became, in part, Autonomy, which is really only one aspect of professionalism. Professional Identity was not

anticipated at all, but would seem to be quite in place. Those who agree with statements like "My work plays an important part in my life," "When a newspaper offends those who belong to my profession I feel as if it offended me," or "I think of those who work in my profession as my kith and kin" attes to identification with their profession, that is, to professional identity. The other items in this factor refer to success authority, and fulfillment.

Several questions on relevant background of teachers inquired into level of education, seniority in profession, sex and size of school, since these may be related to the factors under study: education may be related to professionalism; seniority, to burn-out; sex, to the image of teaching as a feminine occupation; and size of school, to belonging/allienation.

Sample.

In its final form the questionnaire was administered to 190 teachers who constitute a fairly representative sample of teachers in elementary and secondary schools in the Haifa area. Both religious and non-observant (secular schools were included in the sample. While the sample can not be said to be random, there is no reason to suppose that its composition is biased in any known way.

Data analysis.

Since the object of the study was to identify variables possibly accountable for the inclination of teachers to leave the profession, Readiness for Job Leaving was designated as the dependent variable (criterion) in a multiple regression analysis. The predictors were background variables, that is education, seniority, sex, and size of school, as well as the three factors Professional Identity, Work Satisfaction, and Autonomy. In order to trace the flow of direct and indirect influences on the criterion, additional analyses were carried out, with the three attitudinal predictors serving as criteria in turn, or precedure known as path analysis.

FINDINGS

Table 2 lists correlations among all the study variables. The statistically significant correlations are between Job-Leaving and Professional Identity (r=-.376), Professional Identity and Work Satisfaction (.209), and between Work Satisfaction and Autonomy (.282). None of the background variables formed significant correlations with the attitudinal predictors or, what is more important, with Job Leaving.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 3 shows multiple regression analysis by a stepwise regression procedure which selects variables in descending order of contribution to criterion variance. Professional Identity is the only predictor with a significant beta weight, at least with respect to a direct influence on Job Leaving. It accounts for 14.1% out of a total predictive variance of 14.9%. This also means that about 85% of criterion variance remains unaccounted for. Presumably, this is where such economic predictors as working conditions and salary come in.

Insert Table 3 about here

Path analysis is a method that follows up on multiple regression analysis by treating predictors as criteria and regressing them in backward order onto the remaining predictors. In this way the flow of influence, both direct and indirect, can be traced through the whole chain of predictors. Table 4 shows, as may be anticipated from the pattern of correlations in Table 2, a clear and sequential flow from Autonomy via Work Satisfaction and Professional Identity to Job Leaving. Professional Identity mediates

between Work Satisfaction and Job Leaving, while Work Satisfaction mediates between Autonomy and Work Satisfaction. All the connecting links are statistically significant. In simple terms, teachers who feel autonomous in their work tend to be satisfied, and those who are satisfied tend to identify positively with their work. They will be the least likely to leave their jobs. Professional Identity is the most direct and critical antecedent of Job Leaving among intrinsic predictors.

Insert Table 4 about here

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study has identified a number of variables that may point to the main intrinsic motives associated with the heavy teacher turnover. The construct most critical to stability appears to be professional identity. The contribution of autonomy and work satisfaction is entirely indirect. It should be emphasized however, that about 85% of variance in job-leaving remains unaccounted for, probably preempted by material and economic motives. It is also possible that other psychological mediators may be uncovered in the future, but for the moment the main problem is how to strengthen the professional identity of teachers. Food for the guidance of administrators and policy makers in the educational field may be derived from these findings,

A scrutiny of the item content of the three predictors may highlight some of the educational and administrative issues likely to arise in any attempt to apply the present findings to the prevention of attrition in the educational field:

1. Autonomy. Why are teachers complaining about lack of autonomy? Two types of teachers may be involved. One type is genuinely autonomous in

work initiative and curriculum interpretations and may feel restricted in freedom or movement. The other type may not be autonomous at all, but find it convenient to accuse administrators of failing to exert responsibility rather than assuming it themselves. Both types will be dissatisfied with their work, but for different underlying reasons. They will have to be handled differently. The first type of genuine autonomes must be provided with the conditions that will allow for freedom of action, on the one hand, and reasonable constrains, on the other. The second type can be helped by a procedure of individual and group self-confrontation. The procedure may reveal that these people operate on traditionalist assumptions. They embrace autonomy as a slogan merely because it is considered socially desirable. Their claim that there is not enough autonomy in the system is a hollow device to seem to be toeing the normative line. Participation in value clarification training will help such teachers to achieve insight into self and true meaning of autonomy.

2. Work Satisfaction. Only one of the items is of practical use to the school administrator in that it calls for the activation of teachers. The more varied the educational activity in a school the richer the opportunity to provide teachers with scope for activity.

3. Professional Identity. Since this factor was found to explain the question variance in inclination for job-leaving, its items deserve some elaboration. To make teachers feel that their work is worth their efforts ("My job gives me a feeling of success") is consistent with learning theories that emphasize reinforcements and success experiences. An awareness among administrators that teachers must be given appropriate reinforcements will encourage teachers to seek more success experiences, thereby leading to satisfaction and the motivation to expend further efforts.

The item "Teaching gives me the feeling that people can be changed" connotes both that change is a good thing and that "I have the power" to do it. A sense of the need for change and renewal in education is one worth striving for and one that should be inculcated in teachers from the very beginning of their training. The power to change others could be interpreted as an endeavor to force change on others. Certainly, the issue of power or authority is perceived differently by teachers having a progressive vs. a traditional viewpoint as well as by those having a behavioristic or a humanistic orientation. A conservatively minded teacher placed in a progressively oriented environment, one that projects the learner into the center of the classroom and the parent into a position of influence, may well experience value shock and a loss of professional identity. Here, too, value clarification may further an understanding of the authority issue (Rath et al. 1966).

The item that deals with teachers' personal responsibility for the products of their labor is pertinent to the accountability movement, but there is nothing in that movement to help the teacher with the psychological aspects accountability. These involve such personality constructs as locus of control (Rotter, 1966; Lefcourt, 196; Phares, 1976). Teachers motivated by internal locus of control will assume responsibility and guilt more readily than those motivated by external locus of control. This raises the possibility that locus of control will be related to professional identity via the assumption of responsibility for teachers' products.

In sum, the present study attempted to identify and clarify intrinsic motives capable of explaining the widespread inclination to drop out of the teaching profession. Extrinsic motives, such as salary and working conditions, though undoubtedly important, have not been dealt with, as they would be a

a factor in all work turnover and are not likely to be under the control of those administrators who are in day-to-day contact with teachers.

The factors that were identified, Autonomy, Work Satisfaction, and Professional Identity are recommended to the care of all the "significant others" (Fromm, 1941), teachers, principals, inspectors, teacher trainers, and policy makers. A systematic treatment of the job-leaving problem calls for an analysis of its antecedents and may result in plans for improvement. Further studies designed to validate and amplify the present one might constitute a valuable contribution to the treatment and prevention of attrition in the teaching profession.

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TABLE 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Items and Alpha's of Subscales

	M	SD
Readiness for Job-Leaving (r_{tt} = .640)[1]		
I am interested in changing my job and would do so if I could find a better one.	3.97	2.02
I would change my job immediately if I had the opportunity	2.52	1.85
I am ready to change teaching for another job	4.22	2.17
Professional Identity (r_{tt}=.802)		
My work plays an important part in my life	4.53	2.05
My job gives me a feeling of success	4.52	1.90
A sense of authority is tied up with my work	4.86	1.81
Teaching gives me the feeling that people can be changed	4.67	1.70
When a newspaper offends the people in my profession I feel as if it offended me	4.67	1.75
I think of those who work in my profession as my kin	3.18	2.02
The teacher is directly responsible for the product of his work	5.03	1.55
Work Satisfaction (r_{tt}=.728)		
I would have advised my good friend to choose the teaching profession	4.01	1.88
Teachers are interested in having their children become teachers	2.58	1.64
If I had to choose a vocation again I would choose teaching	4.69	2.09
In my work I have the opportunity to do what I like	3.84	1.81
I am satisfied with the status of teachers	2.51	1.76

TABLE 1 (continued)

	M	SD
Autonomy (r_{tt}=.726)		
In most instances may the teacher choose the teaching method he/she prefers	5.07	1.54
My work presents me with many opportunities to use my powers of invention	4.56	1.74
There is ample consideration for teachers' opinions in the choice of text books.	4.02	1.69
The teacher is actually independent of the principal or inspector in his/her classroom work	4.32	1.87
There is consideration for me in the school's policy decisions	3.57	1.68
Teachers' opinions are considered in the determination of curricular content	3.95	1.76
Teachers are given a chance to participate in the determination of teaching methods	4.31	1.72

[1] r_{tt} is the alpha coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951).

Note. Means can vary from a low of 1 to a high of 7.

TABLE 2

Intercorrelations between Study Variables

(N=190)

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Job Leaving	-376**	007	023	019	038	-035
2. Professional Identity		209**	088	-102	-106	063
3. Work Satisfaction			282**	-064	039	030
4. Autonomy				-039	-038	-094
5. Seniority					-115	058
6. Education						384**
7. Size of School						

** p / .01 * p / .o5

Note. All decimals have been omitted

TABLE 3

Prediction of Job Leaving

Predictors	R^2	ΔR^2	beta
Professional Identity	.141		.489**
Work Satisfaction	.147	.006	.064
Autonomy	.148	.001	.040
Seniority	.149	.001	-.015

R^2 = Cumulative variance accounted for up to and including predictor

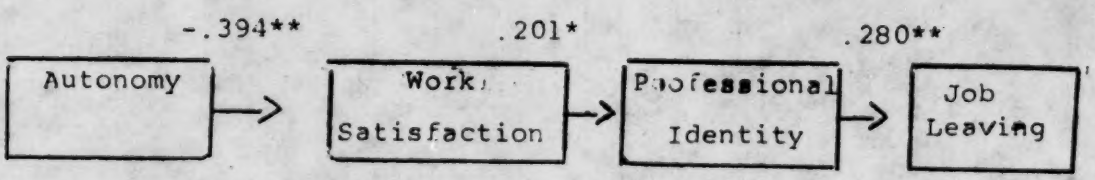
ΔR^2 = Increment in variance accounted for by last predictor

Beta = Coefficient of regression (Standardized)

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4

Flow Model and Path Coefficients



* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$